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News Releases

2008 | 2007 | 2006 | 2005 | 2004 | 2003 | 2002 | 2001 | 2000

29/03/2001

The Federal Government must Fully Support its Aboriginal People CHRC

OTTAWA - March 29, 2001-"Canada's failure to ensure a full measure of social and economic rights for all its citizens is troubling," says Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, Michelle Falardeau-Ramsay, who tabled her 2000 Annual Report and Employment Equity Report in Parliament today.

The Annual Report points out how Canada has fared in making human rights a reality - and how far we have yet to go.

The report indicates, for instance, that as a group, Aboriginal peoples remain among the most disadvantaged in the country. Althougn the government has committed itself to addressing the issues facing Aboriginal peoples, its progress in this regard has been "too little and too slow."

However, the Commission commends the federal government for taking steps to provide Aboriginal peoples with more autonomy. The report mentions two noteworthy developments in this regard: the implementation in April of the Nisga'a Final Agreement, and the opening of the Legislative Assembly of the new Territory of Nunavut, in October.

The Commission also criticizes the lack of progress made in 2000 in regard to persons with disabilities, who are too often denied access to the workforce. "There is still much to be done to make our society barrier-free - to ensure that workplaces, public facilities and services are accessible to Canadians with disabilities," states the Chief Commissioner.

The Commission also expresses ongoing concern about members of visible minorities who continue to be under-represented in the federally regulated workplace, and especially in the public service, where they stand at 5.7 per cent, far short of their 10.3 per cent availability.

"Too many single elderly women continue to live in poverty," states the Chief Commissioner, who notes that one factor contributing to this situation is the continued 'pink-collar' jobs ghettoisation and the resulting inability of many women to save for retirement.

The Annual Report notes that the Commission has dealt successfully with an earlier backlog and has established new service standards for each stage of the complaint process.

The Commission received a total of 1,238 complaints of discrimination in 2000 and completed work on 1,405 complaints. As in previous years, discrimination on the ground of disability generated the largest single number of new complaints, representing 38 per cent of the total received.

2008-02296/

As part of its mandate under the Employment Equity Act - which requires employers under federal jurisdiction to promote workplace equity for women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and visible minorities - the Commission conducts employer audits. In its 2000 Employment Equity Report, also tabled today, the Commission finds after three years of auditing that most employers do not apply the resources and employment equity techniques needed for real progress. As a result, although more employers now meet the requirements of the legislation, it is taking more time and effort to achieve this success than originally anticipated.

Last Updated: 2004-02-27